

CRAWDOOD

"EL TIGRE" MEETS THE STRANGER

by Assassination Information Bureau

On the morning of October 31, 1975, Rolando Masferrer ("El Tigre") switched on the ignition of his car and was blown to smithereens. Just a week before his death, Masferrer had written in *Libertad*, the Spanish-language weekly he published in Miami, that Cuban exiles must be prepared to use dynamite to continue their struggle. Masferrer's murder remains unsolved. Though some might see the hand of Castro in Masferrer's death, it seems likely that Masferrer was a victim of internal disputes which are rife in the Cuba exile-mob-intelligence circles in which Masferrer was a prime mover.

The political and military career of Rolando Masferrer Rojas began during the Spanish Civil War when he fought with the Communists against Franco. Later, in Cuba, Masferrer's politics swung to the far right. He was a power in Cuban politics for more than twenty years, and was especially close to President Batista, in whose support, he once boasted, he had killed 15,000 people. A private army called "Los Tigres" was his chief instrument of terror.

Masferrer was forced to flee Havana the day before Castro's forces entered the city. With a price on his head, Masferrer settled in Florida. Then, in April 1959, soldier-of-fortune and "raconteur extraordinaire" in the Martin Luther King shooting, Jack Youngblood, who had been working for Castro for several years, attempted to kidnap Masferrer and return him to Cuba. Youngblood arranged for two Miami Springs policemen to stage a phony arrest of Masferrer and then hand him over to Youngblood and another pilot. The scheme was broken up at the last moment by Federal officers.

Just before the Bay of Pigs invasion, Masferrer was arrested on the direct orders of Attorney General Robert Kennedy, who was trying to stop the growing influence of Batista partisans in the invasion force. On several occasions, he took part in abortive invasions of Haiti by enemies of President "Papa Doc" Duvalier. One such fiasco occurred in the summer of 1963, when Masferrer took about a hundred Cubans and Haitians to No Name Key, the Florida base for CIA operations against Castro which has figured prominently in the investigation of the assassination of John F. Kennedy. The men were told that they were going to raid the north coast of Cuba, and when they found out that Masferrer's real target was Haiti, the

"invasion" fell apart.

Plans to use Haiti as a jumping-off point to invade Cuba were resurrected in 1966. This particular scheme called for Cuban and Haitian exiles to seize Haiti from a base in the Dominican Republic. Masferrer was employed to raise money and recruit members for the invasion force. This venture had rather unique backing and the two men assured the recruits of high chances for success because the money and prestige of the Columbia Broadcasting System was behind them.

CBS had entered the picture in the spring of 1966 with an attempt to do a



documentary on smuggling guns into Haiti. This developed into a documentary on an attempt to invade Haiti, overthrow the Duvalier regime and use Haiti as a base of operations against Cuba. In the end, by which time CBS had invested upwards of \$250,000, the invasion never took place, the leaders (including Masferrer) were arrested and eventually convicted, and the affair had all the earmarks of an elaborate con job. Although it denied having financed the entire operation in return for exclusive filming rights, CBS acknowledged that some of the money found its way into the hands of the invaders. (CBS also paid handsome consulting fees to CIA munitions manufacturer Mitchell Wertheim.)

One of the recruits, Julio Hormilla, swore in an affidavit that Masferrer and others were "only pretending to launch the invasion of Haiti and Cuba so that they could raise monies for their own selfish use." CBS producer Jay McMillan had begun to feel that the whole affair was a hoax, noting "that money had disappeared around Masferrer before" and he was preparing

to write it off until two U.S. Customs officials pleaded with him to go back in, intimating that there was a much bigger story: Mafia money and a promise of the gambling rights in Haiti if the invasion was successful.

This only resulted in further headaches for CBS. Subsequently, it found itself the target of a Congressional investigation and forced to pay \$15,000 in an out-of-court settlement to Julio Hormilla, who had lost an eye in an injury where, he charged, medical help was delayed until the CBS cameraman could photograph the incident.

Jesus Gonzalez Carta and Masferrer were student leaders at Havana University in the 1930s and they were alternately allies and enemies during the stormy Cuban politics of the 1940s. Gonzalez was arrested in Costa Rica in 1957 and told police he had been paid \$200,000 to kill President Figueres. He escaped from jail, returned to Cuba and in 1959 was deported by Castro. As late as March 1968 he was sentenced to five years in prison in New York for plotting to distribute counterfeit currency in exchange for arms to use against Castro.



On May 29, 1976, the bullet-ridden body of Gonzalez, 53, called "El Extrano" (The Stranger), was found in a field in South Dade County at the fringe of the Everglades. He had been dead for less than a day. Police reported no immediate leads in the case.

The deaths of Gonzalez and Masferrer come at a time when Senate investigators looking into the JFK assassination have found strong indications of an anti-Castroite connection in the president's murder. The names of Gonzalez and Masferrer can now be added to the witness list headed by Jimmy Hoffa and Sam Giancana. ■